

AMHERST HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2004

Charge & Membership

The Amherst Historical Commission is a standing municipal committee of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts, created by Amherst Town Meeting in October 1972. The seven Commission members are volunteer citizens appointed by the Town Manager to three-year terms. Under M.G.L. Ch. 40, Sec. 8D, the Historical Commission is the Town committee responsible “for the preservation, protection and development of the historical or archeological assets” of Amherst.

<u>Current Membership</u>	<u>Year Appointed</u>	<u>Term Expires</u>
Sharon Smith Carty	2000	2006
Edith MacMullen, Chair	2001	2007
Paul F. Norton	2003	2005
Caroline Olson	2003	2006
Max Page, Vice Chair	2001	2007
Jean Thompson, Clerk	2003	2006
James Wald	2002	2005

West Cemetery Preservation Projects

Established in 1730 for the British colonial settlers of the East District of Hadley, West Cemetery is Amherst’s oldest and most historic place. The Commission has been actively working on its preservation and restoration since 1996.

Improvements ~ A Commission subcommittee developed designs and sought cost estimates for new cemetery signs and lighting funded by Fall 2003 Town Meeting through Community Preservation (CPA) funds (\$19,065).

Headstone Restoration ~ Cost estimates were sought for the first of two phases of significant headstone restoration for the cemetery. Estimates have been received for restoration of headstones in the oldest (1730-1830) sections of the cemetery, and CPA funding for this first phase will be requested at the Fall 2004 Special Town Meeting. A second phase of headstone restoration will focus on headstones in the 1870 section of West Cemetery.

West Cemetery Mural ~ Amherst’s first community history mural was developed during a public process conducted in fall/winter 2002-03. In October 2003, the Commission obtained support from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) Committee for a request for \$15,000 in CPA funding to underwrite community fundraising for the mural project. The Fall 2003 Special Town Meeting initially voted the funding but, on a subsequent evening, withdrew that support. Accordingly, an Historical Commission subcommittee began targeted fundraising and grant applications for the West Cemetery mural in November 2003. After obtaining about half of the project cost through targeted fundraising by April 2004, community-wide fundraising was begun in May and the original project-funding goal of \$35,000 was reached by mid-June. Installation

of the mural – paid for entirely through private community donations and gifts – is slated to begin in September 2004 and will involve local high school students and community volunteers.

Other Improvements ~ The 1999 West Cemetery Preservation Plan, the plan for restoring and preserving the cemetery, includes plans for restoring and improving other cemetery structures (the Town Tomb, for instance), landscape plantings, and for making the cemetery more accessible to residents and visitors as an historic site and downtown public open space. Future CPA and other funding requests will address restoration of the Town Tomb and several cast-iron fences around family plots, as well as general improvements (pathways, landscaping, etc.), and improvements of the North Pleasant Street entrance.

West Cemetery Donations. The Commission encourages ongoing community donations to help support this preservation work in West Cemetery. Checks should be made out to either “Town of Amherst, West Cemetery Mural” (to help establish a maintenance fund for the mural) or “Town of Amherst, West Cemetery Improvements” (to help support ongoing cemetery preservation projects), and should be mailed to the Amherst Historical Commission, c/o Amherst Planning Dept., 4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA, 01002.

North & South Amherst Cemeteries

The North Amherst and South Amherst cemeteries were established in 1817-18 and are of considerable historical importance. Once fundamental work has been completed on Amherst’s oldest burying ground (West Cemetery), the Commission intends to apply for funding for preservation/restoration projects for the North Amherst and South Amherst cemeteries.

North & South Cemetery Donations. Interested citizens are encouraged to donate funds to help maintain those cemeteries and to underwrite and help jump-start future preservation work. Checks should be made out to either “Town of Amherst, South Amherst Cemetery Improvements” or “Town of Amherst, North Amherst Cemetery Improvements,” and should be mailed to the Amherst Historical Commission, c/o Amherst Planning Department, 4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA, 01002.

Amherst Preservation Plan

Since summer 2003, the Commission has been working with consultants Martha Lyons and William Geizentanner to develop an overall historic preservation plan for Amherst – the Amherst Preservation Plan. Inventory, assessment, and preliminary public outreach were conducted between September 2003 and February 2004. Public forums to review the draft plan were held on February 20 and June 28. A preliminary draft of the Plan was submitted in early June. The Amherst Preservation Plan will serve as a ten-year action plan for historic preservation for Amherst and is designed to serve as the historic preservation component of a community comprehensive plan.

Demolition Delay Review

Under Article 13, Demolition Delay, of Amherst’s Zoning Bylaw, the Commission reviews and may hold a public hearing on the proposed demolition of any structure or building in Amherst. Following a public hearing, if the Commission finds a structure/building to be significant using the criteria established in the Zoning Bylaw, it may impose a 6-month delay on demolition to

allow exploration of alternatives to demolition. Since July 1, 2003, the Commission reviewed and acted on the following demolition application requests:

<u>Request</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>
Demolish 1880's barn on Town Farm	986 South East Street	Six-month delay imposed
Demolish old garage	334 Lincoln Avenue	Demolition allowed
Demolish portion of an early 20 th century 'camp' residence	312 Leverett Road	Demolition allowed
Demolition of two 1940,s dormitories	Amherst College	Demolition allowed

Advisory Reviews

The Historical Commission has no formal role in the permit review process beyond its demolition delay responsibility. Its advisory review is sometimes requested by other Town boards and committees, or by applicants seeking support for proposed changes to historic buildings, especially buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places or in any of Amherst's nine National Historic Register Districts. Since July 2003, the Commission reviewed and offered recommendations on the following development projects:

<u>Request</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Action Taken</u>
New signs for retail business (Dickinson District)	321 Main Street	Approval recommended
New roofing and skylights for Grist Mill	26 Mill Lane	Approval recommended w/ conditions
Conversion of historic barn to Residence	54 High Street	Approval recommended w/ conditions
Addition & renovations for a non-conforming commercial building	462 Main Street	Approval recommended

Community Preservation Act

Ms. Olson serves as the Historical Commission's representative on Amherst's Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC). The Commission is developing a five-year CPA budget plan for historic preservation projects, including future projects for completion of the 1999 West Cemetery Preservation Plan, projects in Amherst's other historic cemeteries, projects identified by the Amherst Preservation Plan, and others.

Preservation Awards

On August 11, 2003, the Amherst Historical Commission held a Town Hall reception to honor recipients of the 2003 Historic Preservation Awards of Merit, given for notable preservation of historically important farmhouses from different periods of Amherst's agricultural history. Recipients included:

♦ **Dana & Mary Snyder, 870 Bay Road** - For preservation and restoration of an early (1767) New England saltbox home and associated barn. The carefully-restored Snyder home on Bay Road is one of Amherst's best-preserved 18th century homes still in active residential use. A classic central chimney, wooden clapboard New England saltbox, the house was built around 1767-1772. First known residents were Moses Smith and his son Simeon, who ran a profitable wagon freight service to Boston, taking local goods to Boston and returning with shipments of New England rum for the Valley (Moses had previously operated an inn in Hadley). Their location right on "The Bay Road" – also called "The Brookfield Road" for the next significant colonial settlement to the east – must have been a distinct advantage. The barn to the east of the house is also very early and the Snyders are in the process of restoring it, as well.

♦ **Frederick and Linda Hess, 143 North East Street** - For preservation and restoration of a c. 1830 Federal style home and associated barns. The exact date of construction for this attractive Federal-style farmhouse is unknown, but it was in place by the mid 1830's – one of two houses built side-by-side by an early Amherst family of Dickinsons. The Hess house is the only one that survives. It has long commanded an extensive view east across the valley to the Pelham Hills. From 1856 through at least 1873, the house was owned by Willard R. Dickinson, an East Amherst farmer who served in Company D of the 27th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment during the Civil War. The Hess family has done an excellent job of restoring and maintaining the clean, neo-classical lines of this beautiful early Amherst farm residence. The lovely wrap-around porch is a later feature.

♦ **Heather Colson, "Mad Woman Farm," 784 South East Street** - For preservation and restoration of a c. 1850 Greek Revival farmhouse and associated dairy barns. Ms. Colson's clapboarded Greek Revival farmhouse was built c. 1850 by a J.H. Nutting. In 1873, the house was occupied by William Addison Dickinson, a dairy farmer. Mr. Dickinson was one of the original directors of the Bay State Creamery association in January of 1889, and a partner in Dickinson Brothers, a wholesale commission operation that sold meat and provisions from the South East Street farm. The property continued to be operated as a dairy farm by the Wentworth family from the 1920,s through much of the 20th century. The Greek Revival house, rambling rear addition, and tightly-clustered barns and outbuildings represent an important pattern of historic New England farm architecture. Whimsical window treatments are a local fixture.

♦ **Preservation Award Nominations.** The Commission is accepting nominations for 2004 Preservation Awards.

Publications

The Commission sponsored development of a walking tour guidebook of the Dickinson National Historic Register District, focusing on the architecture and history of District buildings and other nearby structures with a connection to the history of the Dickinson family. The guidebook is slated to be completed in FY 05. Similar guidebooks are planned for all of Amherst's nine National Historic Register Districts. The Commission is also co-sponsoring a publication on the history of farming in Amherst.

Liaison

Representatives from the Historical Commission serve on the Community Preservation Act Committee (Ms. Olson) and Comprehensive Planning Committee (Mr. Wald). Alex Kent (not a

Commission member) serves as the Commission's appointee and liaison to the Amherst Design Review Board.

Amherst citizens are encouraged to watch for notice of and attend Historical Commission meetings, and to check out the Commission's activities on the Town of Amherst webpage (www.amherstma.gov).

Edith Nye MacMullen
Chair